

NEWS RELEASE

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**DeNUCCI CITES ESSEX COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPT.
FOR \$43,555 IN UNDOCUMENTED CREDIT CARD CHARGES**

State Auditor Joe DeNucci reported today that the Essex County Sheriff's Department charged \$43,555 in training expenses to two American Express corporate credit cards without sufficient documentation to justify these expenses.

As a result of DeNucci's audit, the Sheriff's Department indicated it has established a written travel policy requiring pre-approval of all travel. In addition, the Sheriff's Department discontinued use of the credit cards last March.

According to DeNucci's audit, the two credit cards, bearing the names of the sheriff and the assistant superintendent of fiscal affairs, were intended for legitimate, training-related expenses. However, the department charged airline tickets, hotel rooms, car rentals, dining expenses, travel agency fees, general merchandise, auto repairs, software, parking tickets, employee awards and magazine subscriptions to the corporate cards with little, if any, documentation to indicate the type of training that was involved, who authorized it, who the participants were or what the official nature of the business was. State law requires that all expenditures be clearly documented and properly classified.

As a result of DeNucci's audit, the Sheriff's Department, which must pay for 40 hours of mandatory in-service training per year for each correctional officer, said its new written travel policy requires employees to get permission from their supervisors for all trips and to get prior authorization for any airfare and hotel costs.

"The Sheriff indicated to me that in the future, he will have proper documentation for travel costs to demonstrate that they are reasonable, necessary and appropriate," said DeNucci.

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Meanwhile, in a follow-up review of his previous report on the abolition of Essex County government and the transfer of all its functions, assets and liabilities to the Commonwealth, DeNucci determined that the department has improved its control over inmates' funds by transferring almost \$900,000 to the Commonwealth, and by continuing to transfer receipts.

Finally, DeNucci's audit recommended that the department seek clarification regarding its retention of both telephone commission revenues and civil process fees. The department has been depositing the telephone revenues, which totaled more than \$1.1 million, into the inmate canteen fund and the civil process fees have been used to pay sheriffs and deputy sheriffs for serving legal papers and documents. State law requires these revenues to be placed in the Commonwealth's general fund, although it appears that a legal loophole may allow the telephone money to be used for the inmates' benefit.

DeNucci said the department should seek legal advice regarding its disposition of the telephone commission revenues and consult with the State Comptroller, among others, concerning its handling of the civil process fees so that it is in complete compliance with state law.

The Sheriff's Department explained that the telephone commission issue is being addressed on a statewide basis by sheriffs whose counties have been abolished. As for the civil process issue, the Sheriff's Department said it is awaiting passage of state legislation that will enable its civil process division to comply with state laws.